

A hand up to help out

If the best way to become a big part of a small town is to dive headfirst into volunteer opportunities, Donna Morris operates at an Olympic level.



THINK PAWSITIVE
COASTAL STORIES WITH MORE WAG
BY GRETCHEN AMMERMAN

The Lincoln City Warming Shelter, the North Lincoln County Historical Museum and Theatre West are just a few of the non-profit organizations that have benefited from the retired hospital administrator's generosity since she moved to Lincoln City from Gresham in 2014.

"My mother and former mother-in-law were of the first generation of women who were working full time and having real careers," she said. "So, when they retired that was it—they just stayed home. That didn't work for me."

Morris didn't have a plan or a penchant for anything in particular except being of service.

"I just got involved with what interested me and where there was a need," she said. "It keeps me off the street and out of my apartment. I hate housekeeping so if I'm volunteering it gives me a break from having to clean."

Though she hadn't been here long, she and a good friend started a successful thrift store called Beachtown Charities that benefited local charities.

"We didn't know what we were getting into or we might have not started it," Morris said. "So many people in this community supported us, like the ReStore helped us out a lot, and Wyndham Properties donated a bunch of TVs when they changed their system that were perfectly good. We gave some to the Eagles and to the Panther Creek Senior and Community Center and



we sold a bunch of them. When we got stuff we couldn't sell we donated it to places like the warming shelter; we spread it around as much as we could. There are so many great people in this town."

Beachtown Charities lasted almost two years before wrapping up and being replaced by a separate nonprofit, Beachtown Charities Thrift & Gift. But the positive experience Morris had with the venture led her to start a new project three years ago—the Volunteer Fair that will take place as part of Giving Tuesday at the Lincoln City Cultural Center on Tuesday, Dec. 3.

"The fair is for potential volunteers who are looking for a perfect fit," Morris said. "It's also for people who want to donate to a non-profit but are unsure which one; and non-profits who are looking for volunteers. There is a core group that comes every year and I have some new ones this year too. Twelve to 15 have committed already and I have calls and emails out to another 12 or so."

Some of the new and returning organizations representing opportunities for those looking to do good are North Lincoln County Historical Museum and the Oregon Coast Community College Foundation, Lincoln County Emergency Services, Boy

Scouts of America, CERT, the Humane Society and CHANCE, which now operates the Lincoln City Warming Shelter.

"I think all the people who came last year got at least one volunteer and some got financial donations," Morris said. "I got the idea from the one in Newport and it's been very successful here."

Even if you aren't ready for a new regular commitment, there will be other ways to support different organizations at the event.

"Backpacks for Kids will be there making pancakes and also selling pancake mixes, Kiwanis will be selling See's Candy and Lincoln City Rotary will be selling holiday wreaths."

One of the reasons Morris can recommend volunteering to others is the connection it creates with other people.

"I tell people that to a large extent you are volunteering because of the people you will be volunteering with," Morris said. "It's been so cool for me to have gotten to know so many people in town so quickly."

One of those people is her co-volunteer at the Lincoln City Cultural Center, Elizabeth Black.

"It's fun at the information center because you get people from all over the world and I love it when Elizabeth asks

people about our 'priceless outdoor treasure'—it makes me laugh every time. She's also part of the reason I got involved with Theatre West."

Some connections are temporary but still rewarding.

"It's kind of cool when I see people I met from working nights at the warming shelter," Morris said. "They don't know my name and I don't know theirs but when I see them they say hi."

Even if you can't make it the the Volunteer Fair, Morris's story shows that when the volunteer is ready, the opportunity appears.

"That's how I got started when I first moved here," she said. "I had just gone into the former Family Promise thrift store because I was going to drop something off and the person on duty looked like he could use some help. So I offered to help and he said, 'Can you start today?'"

Lincoln City has benefited ever since.

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The Volunteer Fair will take place from 10 am to 3 pm on Tuesday, Dec. 3, as part of Giving Tuesday, located in the auditorium of the Lincoln City Cultural Center at 540 NE Hwy. 101. For more information, call Morris at 503-703-8224.